

KLAUS WOWEREIT

b. October 1, 1953

“I want to live in a country that is open to the world, where gays and lesbians live lives free from discrimination.”

Berlin has played a unique role in gay history. Prior to the rise of Fascism in Germany, Berlin was home to the world's first gay rights organization, Magnus Hirschfeld's Scientific-Humanitarian Committee. In 1933, over 100 gay and lesbian bars functioned as social centers in Berlin. The Nazi regime destroyed German gay culture and imprisoned an estimated 15,000 gays in concentration camps.

Berlin is once again a thriving sanctuary for gays and lesbians. In 2002, the city elected Klaus Wowereit as its first openly gay Lord Mayor. Before the mayoral election, Klaus Wowereit declared, “Ich bin schwul, und das ist auch gut so” (“I’m gay, and that’s okay”), paving the way for other gay politicians.

Wowereit grew up in Berlin without a father. The youngest of three siblings, he was the first to attend grammar school. Wowereit praises Willy Brandt, the chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany from 1969 to 1974, for social policies that enabled poor children like him to attend school. He describes Brandt as his inspiration and role model.

Wowereit studied law at the Free University of Berlin and joined the Social Democrats. In 1984, he became Berlin's youngest city councilor. As a councilor of education and culture, Wowereit learned the nuances of Berlin's political atmosphere. In 1995, he joined the Berlin House of Representatives. After four years, the parliamentary group of the Social Democrats elected him their chairman.

Loved by Berlin's citizens, Wowereit handily won reelection as Lord Mayor in 2006 and has maintained high approval ratings.

Klaus Wowereit became the first openly gay Lord Mayor of Berlin.

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